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# A Field Study of Consociationalism in the Northern Ireland Assembly: A Moderating Influence or Threat to Democracy?

Ellen Louise Noble  
*SIT Study Abroad*

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A Field Study of Consociationalism in the Northern Ireland Assembly:  
A Moderating Influence or Threat to Democracy?

Ellen Louise Noble

SIT Ireland: Transformations of Social and Political Conflict

November 29, 2011

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### **Abstract**

This paper is the outcome of a month-long exploratory study on whether consociationalism has a moderating influence on politics in Northern Ireland. I analyzed the impact of consociationalism on policymaking, party platforms and voter choice to determine if it strengthens and enlarges the middle ground or bifurcates the political community into two extreme and conflicting political agendas. Data was obtained through a literature study and eight interviews with academics as well as political representatives and advisors. This research tested two competing theories of consociationalism: David Horowitz's theory of consociationalism as a centrifugal force and John McGarry's and Brendan O'Leary's theory that consociationalism encourages cooperation and unifying politics. It is concluded that consociationalism has had a dramatic moderating influence on policies and political platforms, but voter choice is still controlled by ethnic allegiances. The disconnect between voter choice and actual governance within Stormont allows parties to grandstand on loose, undefined and shifting platforms which stifles the democratic process. This paper recommends a shift in electoral systems or minor changes to the current consociational structure.

### **Acknowledgements**

Without the support of many people this paper would never have been completed. First and foremost, thank you to my program director Aeveen Kerrisk for designing a program that provided me with the experiences and opportunities that inspired my research. Thank you as well for your unrelenting support throughout my independent study and the writing of this paper.

Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Michael Anderson, for always directing me towards sources including articles and interview contacts. Thank you also for the engaging discussions about my paper that provided me with key insights. Your guidance throughout my research was invaluable.

I am grateful for the individuals who took the time out of their day to speak with me. My interviewees were all incredibly generous with their time and willing to help in whatever way they could. I was blessed to have so many individuals, with much more important duties, agree to speak with me.

Finally, thank you to my host parents, Keith Hughes and Lidia Yániz, whose overwhelming hospitality, warm meals and fun conversations gave me the support I needed. Thank you to Clodagh Colleran for helping everyone's experience run smoothly. And thank you also to friends on the program and family back home for your constant support and camaraderie.

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## Introduction

Prior to my research, I spent two and half months in Ireland studying the history and politics of the island. I heard the stories of former prisoners and members of paramilitary organizations, of the sympathizers and the apathetic, and of victims<sup>1</sup> whose worlds were destroyed as they lost friends and family in the conflict. I found many stories disturbing; some men proudly described a victory against the enemy, involving the clever placement of a bomb or the gunning down of men loading their weapons. At other times, I felt the remaining tension of the conflict in the uncomfortable awkward silence after a student's presumptive question or unknowingly insensitive remark. I felt the lasting pain in the voice of a victim as she explained that the man who killed her father walks freely in the halls of Stormont, the parliament building of her own government. If the stories were not enough, the schools and harsh cement walls that divide catholic and protestant communities should be sufficient evidence that Northern Ireland, despite the lack of physical violence, is still a place of extreme political, ethnic and religious conflict. It is hard to overcome 30 years of bloody conflict and the loss of over 3,000 lives.<sup>2</sup>

It was difficult to imagine effective political cooperation after witnessing the deep divisions throughout the community. As a citizen of a country where there is constant gridlock between two different political ideologies, I was baffled by the prospect of a functional government that requires the cooperation of parties emerging from years of violent conflict with one another. After further investigation into the Northern Ireland democratic system, my curiosity grew. I wanted to understand the effect of the power-

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<sup>1</sup> The term victim is not intended to be mutually exclusive with the other groups mentioned. The categorization of victims is complex and not a feat I will attempt in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> "On this Day: 1974: 'Troubles' death toll hits 1,000". *BBC*.

sharing arrangement on party politics and the democratic system at large. With a passion for studying reconstruction and stabilization in post-conflict states, heightened by current events like the Arab Springs, I wanted to investigate how Northern Ireland managed to end most violence and have a functioning government. I set out to investigate the impact of the power-sharing system on Northern Ireland, specifically to see whether it encourages more moderate politics.

In the Belfast Agreement of 1998, political parties from both sides of the ethnic divide agreed to a devolved system of government composed of the Northern Ireland Assembly and a joint cross-community power-sharing executive. There was to be mandatory cross-community voting on major issues and electoral representation in accordance with the D'Hondt method, which is proportional representation by party-list.<sup>3</sup> This power-sharing structure and electoral system of proportional representation are key components of consociationalism, a form of government often recommended for post conflict states. The Belfast Agreement was not immediately effective due to pressures on the IRA to decommission and the DUP's anti-agreement stance. However, all key stakeholders, including the DUP, reaffirmed the agreement in the 2007 St. Andrews Agreement.<sup>4</sup> The political context was finally ripe for a consociational system, planting hope for political stability in Northern Ireland. Today, Northern Ireland is at a new crossroad; with the economic downturn underway, the government is faced with challenges beyond presenting a cooperative government. They must start making serious policy decisions that will produce real and effective results. The symbolism of Martin

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<sup>3</sup> North Ireland Office, "The Agreement," 7.

<sup>4</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly, "The Agreement at St. Andrew's." Annex A, 2 (2007).

McGinnis and Peter Robinson standing together made a difference, but now they must prove they can be a functional government that serves the interests of their people.

This paper investigates whether consociationalism has a moderating influence on politics in Northern Ireland. I will analyze the impact of consociationalism on policymaking, party platforms and elections to determine if it strengthens and enlarges the middle ground or bifurcates the political community into two extreme and conflicting political agendas. First, I outline the methodology of my research, as well as a review of the interview process and prominent topic literature. This includes a discussion of resources, challenges and personal bias. Then, I set up the academic context and introduce the theoretical frameworks that my main argument will engage. Subsequently, I outline my argument. Horowitz's theory of centrifugal force affects voter choice but not actual policymaking or even party platforms beyond basic posturing. In fact, consociationalism has had a dramatic moderating influence on politics within Stormont. The disconnect between voter choice and actual governance within Stormont allows parties to grandstand on loose, undefined and shifting platforms which stifles the democratic process. Finally, I briefly discuss possible solutions including the Deborda voting system advocated by Peter Emerson.

## **Methodology**

To analyze the impact of consociationalism on politics in Northern Ireland, I conducted eight interviews and researched secondary sources including scholarly articles, online newspapers, magazines and books. I also attended one of my academic contacts' graduate level lectures on consociationalism at Queens University that was followed by a

small class discussion. Finally, I heard several lectures on the topic throughout the course of my program that provided a background understanding and made the literature more approachable. A combination of both academic literature and interviews of key players enabled me to connect the ivory tower academic theory to what is actually happening on the ground. It is useful to look at past cases, group psychology, and theoretical explanations, but only by hearing from the people who work within the system and confront these issues daily will research be applicable or helpful to policy decisions.

Like any individual conducting research, I entered the process with unfounded assumptions about what I would discover. I had an initial strong negative reaction to the consociational system, specifically its categorizing parties as nationalist or unionist. I felt this would institutionalize ethnic divisions and create an antagonistic environment where every political battle was unionists versus nationalists. I thought my research would find that consociationalism supports more extreme parties and that that is why the SDLP and UUP lost all of their power. My ultimate conclusion is drastically different and contrary to my original assumption entering the research.

### **A Review of Sources**

For interviews, I targeted academics with published work on consociationalism in Northern Ireland, as well as political representatives and strategists from different political parties. Several factors played a role in deciding which individuals to target for interviews. The most influential factor in choosing a contact was whether I had a connection to the individual that would increase the chances of their cooperation. I took advantage of the connections of my program director, Aeven Kerrisk, and research

project advisor, Dr. Michael Anderson. I also reached individuals who I had heard speak on our student visit to Stormont and a Loyalist Symposium, which I had attended earlier in the month with my study abroad program. When choosing interviewees, I also considered their degree of experience with the political process, amount of relevant academic work on the subject area, or if the individual had a unique experience that made me especially interested in their perspective.

I strived to hear a diverse range of perspectives. Of the eight people I spoke with, three were academics with no stated affiliation. Of the remaining five interviews with political advisors and current and former representatives, three were with unionists, specifically DUP and UUP representatives as well as the former leader of the PUP. My interview with Sinn Fein was the only nationalist representation. In addition, I interviewed an advisor to the green party with no self-identified ethnic affiliation, but from a protestant background. Thus, the nationalist perspective is slightly underrepresented in my primary research. I did have an interview with Conall McDevitt from the SDLP, but after moving the appointment twice, he eventually canceled the day before I had to leave Belfast, which left me no time to find an alternate SDLP perspective. While I would much prefer an equal representation of unionist and nationalist parties, my interviews were never intended to be an accurate survey of party positions. One individual cannot represent an entire party's perspective. In addition, the people I spoke with were often chosen for their unique experiences that would make them poor representatives of the average politician from their party.

I chose not to use a tape recorder because I was speaking with many political representatives and advisors that could be liable for things they say. The topic area was

sensitive because interviewees were often evaluating or describing other parties and politicians at Stormont. I wanted the interviewees comfortable when speaking with me, and politicians tend to get nervous with a recording device in the room since their careers depend on their public image. My highest priority, especially with the politicians, was an honest conversation about the political dynamics, trends, and relationships between parties. For the academics, a tape recorder also did not seem necessary because the interviews were more of discussion where we could engage the ideas and theories together to strengthen my understanding and expand my perspective. My interviews with academics did not attempt to collect their personal experiences or stories. In place of a tape recorder, I took notes by hand. I signified when the interviewee's answer was in response to one of my prewritten questions by marking it with a number that correlated to that question. Immediately after the interview I would type up summaries of the interviews. This allowed me to write down all of the details of the conversation and experience while the information was still fresh in my mind.

I approached each interview as an opportunity to uncover new ideas and perspectives from people who are deeply engaged with the political system or academic debate that I am exploring. The interviews were an opportunity to challenge the interviewees' previously stated positions, to dig deeper into the debate and to hear how individuals experience the consociational system on a day-to-day basis. I decided that a semi-structured interview with questions tailored to each individual would be most conducive to my approach to the interview process. The semi-structured component enabled me to dive into interesting tangents and engage the interviewee in a conversation. I think a conversational tone, even if I was mainly asking questions, made the interviewee

more open and comfortable with me. In addition, generic questions would not give me the opportunity to have a deep conversation about the interviewees' unique experiences and perspectives on the consociational system. For each interviewee, I first did the necessary research on them and their work. Then, I wrote between 12-20 questions to guide the interview towards topics I was most interested in hearing about. There were ultimately 8 sets of questions since the questions were tailored to each interviewee's unique experiences or academic work.

By the end of my research period, I had conducted eight interviews, each between 45 minutes and an hour and a half. Three interviews were with academics, two with experience writing about consociationalism in Northern Ireland and one being an expert on electoral systems in post-conflict states. First, I met with Dr. Peter McLoughlin who is a lecturer at Queen's University Belfast. He has published several books and articles about the politics of divided societies. Most relevant to my research is his article, "Horowitz's theory of ethnic party competition and the case of the SDLP, 1970-79" in the journal of Irish Political Studies. I read and analyzed this article prior to the interview so I could engage with him on a deeper level. After the interview in his office, I sat in on one of his graduate classes where he lectured about the past electoral trends within Irish politics. The lecture was followed by a class discussion in which I had the opportunity to hear the arguments and ideas of his students in relation to consociationalism and recent electoral trends. The debate among the students, as opposed to reading or hearing one position, allowed me to see how all of the arguments on the subject interacted.

The second lecturer from Queen's University I interviewed is Dr. John Garry whose research focus is on electoral behavior, public opinion and party competition in

British and Irish politics. In preparation for this interview I read and critically analyzed five of his articles on the topic of consociationalism including one piece that was under review. The interviews with McLoughlin and Garry occurred around the beginning and end of my research period respectively. The interview with McLoughlin early on in my research made it so during future interviews I could be thinking about how the information I was hearing from political professionals on the ground interacted with the theoretical frameworks. The discussion with Garry at the end of my research period helped me consolidate and crystallize the overload of information I had acquired.

The third academic interviewed was Peter Emerson, director of the De Borda Institute, a nonprofit organization that aims to “promote the use of inclusive voting procedures on all contentious questions of social choice”.<sup>5</sup> In preparation, I read through the material presented on his website as well as one of his published articles. This interview took place at the De Borda Institute, which was not your usual office space. The institute was located in a small cottage full of pots and pans, clothes hanging from the ceiling and many books covering the walls. While I was originally surprised with the setting, it proved to be a warm and welcoming environment. The interview proved very informative and provided me insight into possible alternatives to the current system.

Of the five political professionals, there were two current political representatives, one former representative, and two political advisors. I first met with Ross Brown, a political advisor for the Green Party. Originally from a protestant home, Brown went to school in London and then a Catholic school in the US. His academic journey led him to the Green Party. The conversation with Brown was very open and honest. I do know if

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<sup>5</sup> De Borda Institute.

this is a product of us being closer in age, the low profile of the Green Party and thus lower stakes involved in sharing information, or just the personality of Brown. While little thought was put into the order of interviews due to scheduling constraints, I was very lucky to speak with Ross Brown first. I left the interview with a much greater understanding of party dynamics, including the relationships and conflicts that cannot be read about in secondary sources.

Next, I interviewed MLA Sammy Douglas from the Democratic Unionist Party and MLA John McAllister from the Ulster Unionist Party. Douglas is a former community organizer from East Belfast. While he just entered the Northern Ireland Assembly in May 2011, I thought he would have a unique perspective considering his experience with economic regeneration and social justice. John McCallister was elected in 2007 as MLA for the South Down constituency. He is also the UUP's deputy party leader and new whip. The interviews with Douglas, McCallister and Brown all happened in offices in Stormont. Despite the building's formal appearance, the conversations were mostly casual and tended to start with conversations about my hometown and the Washington DC area.

Finally, on my last day in Belfast, I met with former leader of the Progressive Unionist Party, Dawn Purvis, and Elections Director for Sinn Fein, Gary Flemming. Dawn Purvis left the PUP due to the party's relationship with the Ulster Volunteer Force, and then ran as an Independent Unionist. She lost her seat in the 2011 elections. At first, I found Dawn Purvis very intimidating, but as our conversation developed, the atmosphere became more comfortable. Gary Flemming is a long time political advisor for Sinn Fein and most recently their Election Director. This interview also started out uncomfortable.

It is possible Flemming felt defensive entering our conversation because my email to him explained I was writing about the power-sharing system in Stormont. This is a sensitive issue for many nationalists who fear a change in system would leave them powerless and vulnerable. In conclusion, all my interviews, whether or not they started off uncomfortable, developed into casual and interesting conversations. All of the people I spoke with have seriously reflected on the government structure and electoral system throughout their lives; they all had insightful perspectives.

As for topic literature, I used a variety of sources. I gathered a lot of background and perspective on consociationalism in the book, “The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements” by John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary. I then focused a lot of my research on a core group of authors engaged in a back and forth debate about consociationalism on a theoretical level. This group of literature included several articles written by Arend Lijphart, McGarry and O’Leary, Paul Dixon, David Horowitz Rupert Taylor, Seymour Lipset and published work of my own interviewees, John Gary and Peter McLoughlin. I used these articles to put my own primary research in perspective of the larger theoretical debate between David Horowitz and John McGarry. Next, I used documents from the Northern Ireland Assembly, mainly the full text of the St. Andrews Agreement, to learn how the government system was an example of consociationalism. Finally, I read many news articles from the BBC, the Irish Times and Fort Night magazine. My analysis focuses on the current political climate of Northern Ireland. Many academic articles are too old to use when describing current political trends. Other times, the articles are recently published but focus on consociationalism’s impact when it was

first imposed. Thus, it was essential to supplement my interviews with news and magazine sources in order to best understand the current political climate.

### **Resources, Challenges and Bias**

While there were several minor limits on my research by nature of my undergraduate status, the only limit that significantly impacted my research was time. My research period was limited to a three-week stay at Stranmillis University College in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Due to limited time, I could only conduct a small number of interviews. Some contacts, including Naomi Long from the Alliance Party, did not have free time during the three-week span of my stay. In addition, because it often takes a week or two for individuals to respond to emails and finalize an agreeable time and venue, many interviews were scheduled for my third week. With only so many hours in a day, I could not schedule more interviews midway through the research period without requesting very specific meeting times. Time also prevented me from reading more secondary sources or conducting other forms of empirical research in addition to interviews.

I discovered two main challenges in the interview process. First, it was difficult to avoid leading questions. I would often want to know the interviewee's perspective on a specific issue or argument, but this required special attention to my phrasing so I was not making claims for them and then just asking them to agree or disagree. It is a delicate balance to try and ask pointed specific questions without making assumptions or forcing a particular kind of answer. I improved on this throughout the interview process by learning to ask specific and directed, but still open ended, questions.

Second, I learned to better recognize my biases. Because the interviews were only semi-structured, there was space for my personal bias to shape the conversation. My colored lens could direct what kind of follow up questions I asked. My bias also affects my research outside of interviews. The way I process and think about information is shaped by my personal experiences. One bias I discovered is that I take a stable government for granted because I have never known anything else. This makes me less concerned with conflict management and more worried about the democratic procedures. Second, my understanding of politics comes from the United States where everything is understood along a leftwing - rightwing continuum. As a result, early on in my research I was constantly trying to fit Northern Ireland politics into a liberal-conservative framework or mold that does not exist in Belfast like it does in the US. Finally, my personal liberal bias could have affected how well I connected with different people, which could alter the direction and ease of conversation.

### **The Consociationalism Debate: Academic Context and Theory**

Before engaging in the debate over consociationalism in Northern Ireland, it is important to understand the academic context the debate emerges from. Group theorists Arthur Bentley, Davis Truman and Seymour Martin Lipset argue that the leaders of social groups with “heterogeneous and over-lapping memberships” will find it necessary to adopt moderate positions when in competition with one another. In political terms, if voter preference is of normal distribution on the bell curve, and there are two competing parties, the party that can steal the most middle ground will have the most votes.<sup>6</sup> By

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<sup>6</sup> John Garry, Personal interview (17 Nov. 2011).

contrast, when a society has deep cleavages and little overlapping membership between groups, there is no pressure to become more moderate. From Aristotle to John Rawls, political theorists have argued that moderation is key to political stability in a democratic system.

Academics and policymakers view moderation as a key goal of post-conflict reconstruction. As groups moderate their allegiances in relation to the ethnic conflict, they will antagonize their counterparts less and move further from the radical ideologies that threaten the foundation of the state. The more political moderation, the more space for compromise between divided communities. Lipset asserts that “the chances for stable democracy are enhanced to the extent that groups and individuals have a number of crosscutting, politically relevant affiliations.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, literature evaluating post-conflict government structures focuses on how the system moderates both ethnic allegiances and issue-based agendas.

Arend Lijphart first coined the term consociationalism as he attempted to explain how countries like Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands managed to maintain stability despite their divided subcultures. He credited the political elites’ highly cooperative relationships for the countries’ stability.<sup>8</sup> This paper adopts Lijphart’s definition of consociationalism. He describes it as,

“pragmatically driven elite-level bargaining for a form of executive power-sharing in which the autonomy of contending groups is

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<sup>7</sup> Seymour M. Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1960).

<sup>8</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Consociational Democracy* (*World Politics: a Quarterly Journal of International Relations*. 21.2 1969) 212.

constitutionally guaranteed and protected through mutual veto rights, and where there is a strong respect for the principles of proportionality in elections, civil service appointments and government subsidies.”<sup>9</sup>

Several authors, namely Paul Dixon, argue that Lijphart’s loose definition enables him to claim all successful post-conflict states as prime models of consociationalism and exclude all the failures. Yet because my paper only attempts to evaluate the consociational government model in Northern Ireland, I am less concerned with a universally applicable definition for evaluating consociationalism at large.<sup>10</sup>

Lijphart is the leading defender of consociationalism and believes it is a key moderating force among political elites that can create a stable society from the top down. John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, critical but loyal consociationalists, believe the power-sharing system forces cooperation and compromise between divided parties and is “intended to foster tolerance, mutual recognition, and respect for differences.”<sup>11</sup>

Donald Horowitz, on the other hand, criticizes the application of consociationalism in Northern Ireland. He argues that it does not foster moderate politics, but instead, creates a centrifugal force moving voters toward more extreme parties. Horowitz believes the mandatory categorization of political parties as nationalist, unionist or other institutionalizes ethnic divides. As a result, politics cannot be the vehicle for moderation of ethnic allegiances, social transformation and eventual integration.<sup>12</sup> He

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<sup>9</sup> Rupert Taylor, *The Belfast Agreement and the Politics of Consociationalism: a Critique* (The Political Quarterly, 2006) 218.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Dixon, *Consociationalism and the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 1997) 25-30.

<sup>11</sup> John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland* (Political Studies, 1996) 135.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor, 217-225

also highlights the mutual veto power only available to ethnically affiliated parties, which disadvantages the multi-ethnic or non-ethnic parties who take the moderate stance on conflict-based issues.<sup>13</sup>

At the heart of his criticism, is the belief that consociationalism will not support political moderation, but rather, destroy it. Normal politics have a centripetal pull towards the moderate center to pick up floaters. By contrast, in the consociational system there is little chance any voter crosses the ethnic divide so there is no incentive for parties to move toward the middle ground. For consociationalism, the competition is within each ethnic community and this creates a centrifugal force because of intra-ethnic outbidding.

Intra-ethnic outbidding is when parties compete for the role of the more extreme party since any compromises with the other ethnic group is seen as a weakness that the adversary will take advantage of.<sup>14</sup> National-ethnic communities want a party that will be the strongest defender of their interests and who will not sell-out to their ethnic opponents. Horowitz sees the continuous public fear of a majoritarian institution or non-ethnic or multi-ethnic parties as evidence that the conflict is still very much alive in politics.<sup>15</sup> Consociationalism fails to move the state forward towards peace. Instead, it re-trenches divisions and leads moderates, fearful of losing out in negotiations, to more extreme parties.

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<sup>13</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *Explaining the Northern Ireland Agreement: the Sources of an Unlikely Constitutional Consensus* (Sage, 2002) 195.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Mcloughlin, *Horowitz's Theory of Ethnic Party Competition and the Case of the Northern Ireland Social Democratic and Labour Party, 1970-79* (Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 2008) 551.

<sup>15</sup> Horowitz, 200.

By contrast, Lijphart is not persuaded by a plea for social transformation. He is less concerned how the public feels about one another and more interested in seeing political elites work together to maintain power and a stable state. In fact, Lijphart thinks a kind of voluntary apartheid system may be the best option for a divided society. He argues that clear boundaries dividing subcultures, both physical and metaphorical, make it easier for the groups to co-exist.<sup>16</sup> The less contact between groups, the less chance for conflict. Lijphart is not concerned that consociationalism institutionalizes or re-entrenches ethnic divisions because he thinks clear-cut divisions are actually useful to maintaining peace.

McGarry and O'Leary, however, are more sympathetic to Horowitz's argument. They argue any approach that attempts to integrate, empower cross-community political parties or even remove the peoples' fixation on ethnic identity is desirable but unrealistic.<sup>17</sup> They believe consociationalism is a transitory government system and is the best option available. Moreover, consociationalism effectively involves former radical and violent groups in the political structure giving them a new outlet for their activism.<sup>18</sup> While they agree social transformation leading to a normalization of politics is ideal, they do not believe it can be achieved any time soon, especially considering the remaining constitutional question in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>16</sup> Lijphart, 219.

<sup>17</sup> McGarry, John and Brendan O'Leary, *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements* (Oxford University Press 2004).

<sup>18</sup> McGarry, "Consociational Theory," 260-61.

### **Consociationalism in Northern Ireland**

The first strand of the 2007 St. Andrews Agreement outlines the power-sharing arrangement. The nominating officer of the largest party from the largest designation nominates the First Minister and the nominating officer from the largest party in the second largest designation in the Assembly nominates the Deputy First Minister.<sup>19</sup> In practice, this means the two largest parties within each ethnic community, currently the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, share executive power with a mutual veto policy.

The document states that absent consensus within the Executive on a particular issue, the vote would be taken on a cross-community basis.<sup>20</sup> This element of the agreement is implemented through the petition of concern, which states that 30 MLAs may move to require a cross-community vote on a particular motion, which requires a majority vote from both the unionist and nationalist communities. Petition of concerns are frequently used when legislation is controversial, related to the ethnic conflict or otherwise significant.<sup>21</sup>

Northern Ireland uses the De Haant electoral model, which is a form of proportional representation designed for a divided society. This system allocates representatives, ministerial positions of the 12 departments, and even speech time in accordance with the “highest average”, a party’s total vote divided by a certain figure, which increases as the party wins more seats. In the first round, the dividing figure is one,

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<sup>19</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly, Annex A, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly, Annex A, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Rick Wilford and Robin Wilson, *A Democratic Design?: The Political Style of the Northern Ireland Assembly* (London: Constitution Unit, School of Public Policy, UCL, 2001) 49.

but in subsequent rounds it is the total number of seats gained plus one. The result is a system that largely benefits the biggest parties but leaves room for smaller parties to gain a few seats.<sup>22</sup>

While the definition of consociationalism is not clear-cut, the Northern Ireland government structure is based on the core principles of a consociational government. While consociationalism is suppose to be a transitory process, it is unrealistic Northern Ireland changes its system for a long time because nationalists need a power-sharing arrangement to feel secure. As a result, consociationalism needs to be able to withstand time and its long-term impact on politics is important. An analysis of the shift in policymaking, party platforms and electoral trends will illustrate whether this form of government acts as a moderating force. My goal is to compare the theoretical debate to the voices on the ground.

Horowitz's theory is that consociationalism encourages ethnic outbidding. He argues that within each ethnic community, parties compete to be the stronger party that will fight the hardest for their own people in negotiations. He believes this is dangerous because it creates a race between parties to become more extreme and cooperate less with the other side since that may be seen as a sign of weakness.<sup>23</sup> The problem, of course, is that a system that creates an incentive for parties to become more extreme and antagonistic is not healthy for a post-conflict state. On the other hand, McGarry and O'Leary believe that the system forces cooperation and the formation of compromises and moderate politics. I will examine whether consociationalism is a centrifugal force, as Horowitz suggests, or if it is a moderating influence as argued by McGarry and O'Leary.

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<sup>22</sup> D'Hondt system for picking NI ministers in Stormont (*BBC* 11 May 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Mcloughlin, "Horowitz's Theory," 551-552.

I will explore these conflicting theories by analyzing consociationalism's affect on policymaking, party platforms and voter choice.

### **Policies and Platforms: Contesting Horowitz's Theory**

I contend Horowitz's fear of consociationalism creating extremist, divided and antagonistic policies and political agendas within Stormont is misplaced. There is no outlet in Stormont for parties to engage in ethnic outbidding in terms of policymaking. Horowitz's centrifugal force only applies to matters related to the ethnic conflict because those are the issues that trigger fear in people and create a defensive posture where voters need the strongest, most extreme party to protect them in negotiations. However, matters related to the conflict or otherwise controversial are rarely on the table. Green Party advisor Ross Brown explained that, due to the petition of concern, basically a mutual veto, any vote that threatens the power of either ethnic group would be immediately shut down.<sup>24</sup> In fact, it is not even worth the effort pursuing policies to posture for hardliners because there is no chance such policies would make it through the system.

Lets put this argument in perspective. Imagine the DUP wanted to take votes from the UUP by engaging in ethnic outbidding. They might consider pushing a policy for stricter policing since their constituents have viewed the police as their protector in the past. However, if the DUP tried to posture itself as fighting for the protestant's issues, Sinn Fein would look weak. As a result, Sinn Fein would immediately enact the petition of concern to block DUP's new policing policy. There is no room for parties to pursue

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<sup>24</sup> Ross Brown, Personal interview (4 Nov. 2011).

antagonistic policies and thus, fortunately, consociationalism does not encourage extremism in policymaking.<sup>25</sup>

As for party platforms, ethnic outbidding exists only in terms of posturing. Because politicians cannot pass policies that benefit their ethnic group relative to the other, their platforms have to address issues that are actually feasible to implement. MLA for the UUP, John McCallister, explained that debates about the police service or other conflict related issues are a throwback to the past. These days, politicians are under pressure to talk about the bread and butter issues. He also said that politics use to be very inward looking, but now politicians are focusing on issues that will affect the public. Politics is moving past the original focus of just keeping Stormont afloat.<sup>26</sup>

While platforms are substantively less divisive, parties still posture when presenting their agendas. For example, when I spoke with the Election Director of Sinn Fein, Gary Flemming, he continued to reinforce that the party plans to reunite the north with the Republic of Ireland. He mentioned integrating government structures even though he must know that such an effort is, for now, politically impossible.<sup>27</sup> Flemming's posturing, despite the political realities, goes to show how Horowitz's theory of the centrifugal force exists only on the surface, on a perceptual level. It does not have a significant impact on parties' political agendas. Parties may occasionally grandstand on divisive issues to remind voters whose side they are on, but they will not be pressured to make their platforms more extreme because there is no threat of an opposition that can "out bid" them.

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<sup>25</sup> Gerry Moriraty, North hopes 'vision thing' may bring a bounce (*The Irish Times* 19 Nov 2011).

<sup>26</sup> John McCallister, Personal interview (15 Nov. 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Gary Flemming, Personal interview (18 Nov. 2011).

There cannot be a more extreme alternative party within either ethnic community because such an antagonistic party would not be able to function in Stormont. To be a more extreme or stubborn party without rejecting the agreement would result in complete gridlock, but at this point in the process, constituents want a functional government more than a party that never compromises. As DUP MLA Sammy Douglas explained, the majority of people want the system to work”.<sup>28</sup> They want to see a party negotiate well for their interests, which means the party has to come back to show its constituents some benefit it effectively negotiated for. The public is not in favor of a pre-agreement world so parties that try to outflank Sinn Fein or the DUP will find it difficult to gain traction. Thus, despite occasional posturing, party platforms also have to become moderate and advocate policies that are politically realistic. Horowitz’s theory of a centrifugal force pushing parties to the edges of the political spectrum does not accurately describe the policymaking and political agendas developing in Northern Ireland.

Despite the inapplicability of Horowitz’s theory on current policymaking and platform setting, I agree with Peter McLoughlin that Horowitz’s theory did have a greater impact on politics in the years following the Belfast Agreement. He explains that it was impossible for the SDLP to compromise after the bloody events of the early 1970s. In reaction, the SDLP fell back on its Catholic nationalist base. Because the birth of the SDLP and their efforts to compromise coincided with the Troubles, they were forced to abandon their compromising and peacemaking position in order to stay afloat in the political arena.<sup>29</sup> In addition, “in 1977 the Irish Independence Party, though weak, challenged the SDLP causing them to ‘go more green’ which led to the departure of two

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<sup>28</sup> Sammy Douglas, Personal interview (15 Nov. 2011).

<sup>29</sup> McLoughlin, “Horowitz’s Theory,” 564-565.

founding fathers, Devlin and Fitt.<sup>30</sup> The incentive to be the stronger party in terms of defending your ethnic group's interests played a much larger role during the emergence of the consociational system.

This discrepancy can be explained by the unique political context. At that time, people did not fully believe a functional government was more important than how sectarian issues were resolved. Therefore, there was space for groups to steal the hardliners' support by opposing the agreement. Yet, since then, Sinn Fein and the DUP have effectively moved inwards towards the middle while maintaining in step with their base. Over time, they have constantly pushed inwards but are always careful not to become too moderate, too fast and risk losing their hardliner base.

### **Policies and Platforms: Moderation Through Intra-Group Competition**

The moderating influence of consociationalism on policies and political agendas is significant. This movement towards the middle ground is caused by intra-group competition. To gain more votes within their ethnic communities, parties must move towards the middle.<sup>31</sup> Academic from Queen's University, Peter McLoughlin, explains that Sinn Fein has become increasingly moderate and adopted the SDLP's original platform, thus effectively co-opting many of their supporters. He sees a parallel trend in the unionist community. The DUP, a party that originally refused to sit in the same room as Sinn Fein, is now very cooperative in committees and at the ministerial level. In a sense, they too, have taken the UUP's original peace making status.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> McLoughlin, "Horowitz's Theory," 569.

<sup>31</sup> Garry.

<sup>32</sup> Peter McLoughlin, Personal interview (8 Nov. 2011).

In addition, Sinn Fein, known for its leftist politics, is increasingly conservative, while the conservative DUP is increasingly liberal. Both parties are moving towards the center. Brown stated that Sinn Fein's economic policies are increasingly more conservative.<sup>33</sup> Brown also mentioned the SDLP, originally leftwing, was moving towards the right and pointed to the growth of conservative Catholics in the party.<sup>34</sup> Douglas agreed with Brown's take on Sinn Fein economic policies. Douglas thinks Sinn Fein is becoming more conservative while the DUP becomes more liberal. He explained that the DUP was less church oriented and moving towards the center. He went on to say, "Peter Robinson and I want to go back to the DUP's roots with the lower class".<sup>35</sup> Later that day, McCallister told me his party, the UUP, was the real centrist party. As support, he referenced David Cameron legislating for gay marriage in Britain. I inferred the UUP support David Cameron because of the context of McCallister's reference to him when describing the UUP's increasingly moderate political stance. McCallister also agreed that the DUP was becoming increasingly moderate on the political spectrum. He said the DUP was moving inward and claiming the UUP platform. Young people are not embarrassed to vote for them anymore and Peter Robinson is moving towards the center ground. McCallister continued to explain it was "getting crowded in the center" and that there's been moderation both in terms of sectarianism and left versus right wing politics.<sup>36</sup> All parties are competing within their ethnic block to be moderate and collect the most votes. Consociationalism creates intra-block competition, which can have a moderating effect.

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<sup>33</sup> Brown.

<sup>34</sup> Id.

<sup>35</sup> Douglas.

<sup>36</sup> McCallister.

In conclusion, I found that there was no meaningful centrifugal force in terms of policymaking and party platforms. Instead, there is a significant shift towards more moderate politics. While it is encouraging to see more moderate policies and compromising among political leadership, it is also important voters' political views are increasingly moderate and less antagonistic.

### **Voter Choice: The Prisoner's Dilemma of Consociationalism**

Consociationalism has less of a moderating influence on voter choice. Voter choice is not necessarily controlled by policy making and platforms. People can vote for a candidate based on characteristics that do not affect their actual polity. For example, they could vote based off the candidate's appearance, personal character, family background, or in this case, ethnicity and religion. Moreover, you can vote for a candidate as a symbolic gesture to support the causes they stand for, even if you know they cannot realistically legislate on behalf of those causes. Through my discussions with political representatives, it seems that voter choice can still be explained by Horowitz's theory that consociationalism acts as a centrifugal force.

Voters choose which party to vote for based on who they think will best protect their interests in negotiations. They tend to make this decision based on which party is perceptually more aggressive and stronger in defending the interests of their ethnic group. Voters view politics as a zero-sum game, whether or not it actually is, explained Dawn Purvis, former leader of the Progressive Unionist Party. She explained that most people want to vote for the aggressive party and because of the way history played out, those

parties are Sinn Fein and the DUP. Flemming, when explaining the growth of Sinn Fein, said “the negotiating strength of Sinn Fein actively captured people’s imagination”.<sup>37</sup>

Brown explained the phenomenon as a classic prisoner’s dilemma. Ideally, both parties vote for the cooperative party and then the two most cooperative parties can govern most effectively. However, if one party votes for the cooperative party and the other votes for the more extreme one, voters feel the cooperative party would be taken advantage of and their ethnic group would lose power and be in danger. Therefore, voters tend to vote for the most extreme party that they think will fight the hardest and not sell out their constituents in negotiations. This creates an unfortunate scenario where the two most extreme or antagonistic parties are in office together.<sup>38</sup> In the case of Northern Ireland, we know the voters’ decision to put in power the two most extreme parties does not cause much damage because the system forces them to cooperate. However, the prisoner’s dilemma is still perceived to be true. Voters still believe they are in danger unless they vote the extreme party in power. Thus, voter choice is affected by Horowitz’s theory of ethnic outbidding even if it does not affect actual policy.

As a result, parties must put on a performance. It is important for parties, mainly Sinn Fein and the DUP, to be perceived as hardliners, even if they cannot actually act as hardliners because of the structure of consociationalism. Brown believes Sinn Fein and the DUP are very conscious of this. He said that when the cameras are on in the chambers the DUP and Sinn Fein throw around insults and act aggressive. When the cameras are off, however, and they are working side by side in committees, they tend to get along

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<sup>37</sup> Flemming.

<sup>38</sup> Brown.

quite well.<sup>39</sup> Hard-line unionist Jim Allister agreed with this sentiment when he recently said “When you get up close to them at Stormont it still amazes me how those who once pledged to smash Sinn Féin are today their buddies.”<sup>40</sup> It is in both the interest of Sinn Féin and the DUP to be perceived as antagonistic and at each other’s throats because it is that kind of posturing that keeps Catholics and Protestants too scared to vote for a more compromising party.

Of course, to claim all constituents cast their votes just to preserve their ethnic group’s relative power is an over simplification and inaccurate, but the political leaders and academics I spoke with did believe the prisoner’s dilemma mentality plays a major role in elections. Thus, when determining if consociationalism has had a moderating influence on Northern Ireland politics, the answer is messy. There is a legacy of Horowitz’s model that continues to affect voter choice, but at the same time the parties are moving inward and adopting more moderate policies and platforms. Thus, in the words of McLoughlin, “the parties that seem extreme are really quite moderate”.<sup>41</sup>

### **Policies and Platforms: Moderate or Meaningless?**

Because voter choice is often determined by the perception of a party’s allegiance to their ethnic community and not their actual policies, a problem with consociationalism arises. As seen above, Sinn Féin and the DUP can rely on a large sum of votes just by nature of their reputations as the defenders of nationalist and unionist interests. This gives them the freedom to become more moderate, but also to stand on loose, undefined

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<sup>39</sup> Id.

<sup>40</sup> Scott Jamison, TUV chief urges resistance to ruling parties (*The Irish Times* 21 Nov 2011).

<sup>41</sup> McLoughlin, Personal interview.

shifting platforms. Each party has a strong base of loyal hardliners so they dedicate their efforts to attracting the floating voters, those without strong allegiances who may shift to Sinn Fein from other parties. The hardliner bases are so loyal that parties are able to become overly inclusive and claim to serve other groups with radically different interests. The disconnect between voter choice and actual governance within Stormont allows parties to grandstand on loose, undefined and shifting platforms which stifles the democratic process.

There is a difference between increasingly moderate agendas and undefined shifting agendas. Moderate politics does not mean the party chooses to stand for nothing. As parties and platforms have become more moderate, they may have also become less defined and too broad. After speaking with political figures, it is unclear what each party stands for outside of unattainable nationalist and unionist agendas. Parties are voting on normal issues including budgets, education, corporate tax, etc, but there is not an ideology directing their decisions or a consistent application of principles.

Political representatives and advisors recognize the fluidity of their political agendas. Purvis explained how the DUP had both upper-class unionists and very low class loyalists. The DUP is able to sell their platform to two groups whose interests should diverge in terms of taxes and government funded support programs. Purvis also explained that the DUP often tries to be economically conservative and socially liberal, which she does not think makes sense since interventionist economic policies are needed to support social programs.<sup>42</sup> The fact that Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson, two people with radically different agendas, are major players in the same party is evidence of the

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<sup>42</sup> Dawn Purvis, Personal interview (18 Nov. 2011).

shifting and undefined position of the DUP. The Alliance Party's platform is also vague. The most clear concrete component about their political agenda, according to Brown, is that they are not nationalist or unionist.<sup>43</sup>

Douglas was quick to admit that "the DUP was becoming a broad church" that is content with both rightwing conservatives and leftwing liberals.<sup>44</sup> He went on to describe the UUP as a party of independents because they disagree with each other in committees and are not always unified during committee votes. When I asked Douglas and his intern, Phill Brett, the difference between the DUP and the UUP, there was a short pause. Bret explained the two groups had a different way of selling the same message and Douglas referred to the UUP as a more middle class party looking to score political points. They did not mention any differences related to the two parties' positions on actual issues.<sup>45</sup> It seems like the DUP and UUP have a loose and shifting political agenda that can be tailored to attract different groups. In fact, I predict that the DUP platform was described in a different light when Peter Robinson recruited Sammy Douglas to run for election as a member of the DUP.

When I met with Sammy Douglas from the DUP, I became very confused as to what kind of party the DUP was. My readings on Northern Ireland politics had described the DUP as a very conservative party, but Douglas immediately told me he was a member of the Old Labor Party in Britain that is notorious for its very liberal agenda. He went on to explain how he wanted welfare programs for the communist most difficult to reach and policies to help with employment rates. This agenda was not consistent with the DUP's

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<sup>43</sup> Brown.

<sup>44</sup> Douglas.

<sup>45</sup> Id.

stated conservative economy platform. He went on to accuse the UUP of being too conservative when they are normally thought to be a more centrist party.<sup>46</sup> During my interview with Purvis, I asked her about Sammy Douglas' and the DUP's political ideology. Purvis smiled slightly and said that Sammy is confused. She told me she tried to explain to him that he could not hold on to his socialist roots now that he is a member of such a conservative right wing party. While I found the DUP's political agenda to be riddled with contradictions and overly broad, Sinn Fein was also worrisome.

Sinn Fein's platform is equally undefined outside of its aspirations for a united Ireland. Flemming explained that it was very difficult to balance the interests of hardliner supporters and more moderate members without sending two different messages. Brown stated that Sinn Fein voted for one of the most conservative budgets of all time. He believes Sinn Fein's stated economic philosophy is not apparent in their actual decisions.<sup>47</sup> Purvis told me Deputy Minister, Martin McGinnis, once said there was no a cigarette paper between him and DUP First Minister, Peter Robinson, on economic issues.<sup>48</sup> Sinn Fein becoming more conservative in their economic policies is just a party becoming more moderate, but Sinn Fein continuing to grandstand on a socialist economic agenda to sections of their constituents and then voting for a conservative budget is more troubling.

Voters, on balance, are not making their decisions based on policy issues, so parties can get away with a loose undefined platform. Voters giving parties the freedom to have undefined and inconsistent political agendas poses a serious threat to democracy.

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<sup>46</sup> Id.

<sup>47</sup> Brown.

<sup>48</sup> Purvis.

If voters feel required to cast votes to protect their ethnic party, regardless of the substantive issues, they are in a sense disenfranchised. If consociationalism wants to live up to its democratic ideals, it needs to encourage voting based on substantive issues.

### **A Potential Solution: The De Borda Electoral System**

Director of the De Borda Institute, Peter Emerson, studies different types of electoral systems in post-conflict states. He grew up with one British parent and one Irish parent. Frustrated with the categorization of people and divisions within society, he began to study conflict resolution in many areas including the Balkans. He takes a strong stance against majoritarianism and referendums because he believes they over limit the people's choices. While he thinks the De Haunt method paired with the consociational system is preferable to a purely majoritarian system, he believes the political climate would improve if Northern Ireland adopted the De Borda electoral system.<sup>49</sup> There should be opportunities for smaller factions within ethnic divides to grow, as well as cross-community parties. There needs to be space for parties to gain votes because of their stance on labor rights or economic freedom, not just the strength of their ethnic allegiance.<sup>50</sup>

The De Borda system has voters rank the options or candidates from first preference onwards. Voters can choose to rank only one candidate, but their votes will be worth more, the more candidates they rank. This voting system was illustrated in 1986, eight years before the ceasefire, when Emerson held a meeting with representatives from

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<sup>49</sup> Peter Emerson, Personal interview (14 Nov. 2011).

<sup>50</sup> Tom Hadden, Fixing the structure for shared government (*Fortnight Magazine* Mar. 2010) 5.

every major political party except the DUP. The 200 person meeting began with a moment of silence; it was a major moment to have all the different political groups in one room. Next, there was a large discussion in which anyone could suggest a solution to the constitutional question that was tearing apart Northern Ireland. The only caveat was that the suggestion could not violate the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which meant a party could not offer the solution of killing all the Protestants or Catholics. At the end of the discussion, there were ten options on the ballot. Through the discussion, people had brainstormed eight options beyond being part of Britain or being part of the Republic. Each individual in the room was then asked to rank the options one through ten. They could choose to rank only one option, but then their vote would only give that option one point. On the other hand, if they ranked all ten, their first choice would get ten points, second choice nine points etc. The system created an incentive for people to consider other ideas and express their opinions on them.<sup>51</sup>

If Northern Ireland used this system, it would increase cross-community dialogue and expand that factors that influence voter choice. In Emerson's experiment, it is in the interest of each group to persuade others to rank their option 5<sup>th</sup> instead of 8<sup>th</sup> because that could actually affect the election. In the case of Northern Ireland politics this means parties cannot rely on an easy win because of their hardliner base. Even if Sinn Fein gets all the hardliner votes, the SDLP could still gain seats if both nationalists and unionists ranked it a high second. Moreover, it provides an opportunity for smaller parties to gain influence because people can give them votes without abandoning their first preference. Most importantly, voters would have to consider who to give their second or third

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<sup>51</sup> Emerson.

preferences to if they wanted their vote to be weighted for their first preference. This would force them to break through the mentality that politics is a zero-sum game and encourage them to think about more diverse reasons to vote for a candidate or party. If voters are looking at real policy issues, then parties will be forced to create a stable platform to retain votes, thus reinforcing democratic values within the consociational system. Consociationalism could continue to be a moderating influence on policymaking and political platforms, but voter choice would become more substantive preventing parties from grandstanding on overly broad and shifting political agendas.

There are other suggestions that have been made as well. Including abolishing the distinction between First and Deputy First Minister so that voters, especially unionists, are not controlled by the fear that they will lose their position as First Minister and therefore never vote outside of the DUP. This seems like an easy change to make to the system since the two positions hold the exact same powers. Other ideas include increasing the role of non-aligned 'other' parties by allowing their votes to count for cross-community support when there's a petition of concern. Some people have talked about restructuring the government so there can be an opposition, increasing the options for voters. At minimum, the government should commission an independent review of the electoral system and be discussing ways it could be improved.<sup>52</sup>

## **Conclusion**

I set out to analyze whether consociationalism, both in terms of the electoral system and government structure, had a moderating influence on Northern Ireland

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<sup>52</sup> Hadden, 6.

politics. I planned to see if Horowitz's theory of a centrifugal force accurately describes Northern Ireland politics or if McGarry and O'Leary's theory prevailed and consociationalism created a centripetal force, pushing parties towards the moderate middle ground. Through interviews and topic literature, I concluded consociationalism does have a moderating influence on policies and platforms. Both on sectarian issues and on the liberal – conservative divide, political parties are enacting more moderate policies and adopting increasingly moderate political agendas. With the exception of the occasional posturing for hardliners, there is no opportunity for extreme, antagonist or conflict-related politics within Stormont.

However, Horowitz's theory does continue to explain voter choice. Voters still want to vote for the party they perceive to be more extreme, even if the party is increasingly moderate in actuality. Voters are still swayed by the purely perceptual posturing of politicians and believe they must vote for the most antagonistic of the parties because a compromising party would be taken advantage of giving too much power to the other side. Because voters constantly give their support to the seemingly hardliner parties, Sinn Fein and the DUP, these parties are not held accountable to a consistent political agenda outside of "being nationalist" or "being unionist". As a result, parties have vague and undefined platforms that shift depending on whose votes they are trying to attract at the time. A potential solution to this threat to democratic values is the De Borda Electoral system, a form of consensus voting that encourages voters to consider issues unrelated to ethnic allegiances.

My argument was formed through the stories and idea of the people I spoke with. If I had the time to speak with 30 or more even if I had just spoke with eight different

people, my conclusions could easily be different. My research is not a conclusive claim about consociationalism in Northern Ireland or the academic theories surrounding it. Rather, my argument is an attempt to consolidate the opinions and information I was told into a cohesive report of consociationalism's impact on Northern Ireland politics. Future researcher should test the opinions and hypothesis I heard from my interviewees through rigorous empirical research. They could also focus on whether the moderating influence of consociationalism is different on conflict related issues compared to general bread and butter issues.

Through this project I gained an overwhelming admiration and respect for the people I spoke with and the efforts of the many individuals in Northern Ireland that have brought the state this far along in only a few years. In the midst of studying electoral trends and analyzing ivory tower academic theories, it is easy to forget about the darkness these political complexities emerge from. As academics analyze the behavior of voters and politicians in post-conflict states, it is important to remember many of these individuals went through unimaginable traumas. Many of the people I spoke with experienced, in one way or another, the violent conflict that plagued Northern Ireland for 30 years. When you put Northern Ireland's political climate in perspective, both sides of the conflict have come so far. Politicians, despite all emotional stress, sit down with the other side. Voters express their perspectives through a ballot box instead of violence. Consociationalism has brought stabilization and done its best to give people a voice. While there is room for improvement, the people of Northern Ireland have moved the country in a better, more peaceful direction.

## Appendix A.

## Glossary of Terms

Consociationalism: A form of government often used in post-conflict states. It is pragmatically driven by elite-level bargaining in the form of executive power-sharing in which the autonomy of contending groups is constitutionally guaranteed and protected through mutual veto rights, and where there is a strong respect for the principles of proportionality in elections, civil service appointments and government subsidies.<sup>53</sup>

Centrifugal Force: The increasing divisions within politics as parties move farther from center moderate ground and adopt more extremist, radical or even antagonistic agendas.

Centripetal Force: A unified force that brings people together towards the middle ground. It describes the trend of political parties becoming moderate and moving inward.

Ethnic Outbidding: Outbidding occurs when parties compete for a position toward the end point of a spectrum. In the case of ethnic outbidding, that spectrum measures a party's ethnic allegiance. Thus, ethnic outbidding is when parties compete to be most aligned with and most dedicated to working for the interests of a particular ethnic group.

Intra-Ethnic Competition: Political competition within respective ethnic communities. In the case of Northern Ireland, two nationalist parties like Sinn Fein and the SDLP in competition for votes would be an example of intra-ethnic competition.

Posturing: To adopt an attitude or position for politically strategic purposes.

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<sup>53</sup> Taylor, 218.

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